

Carter Plan to Increase Defense Spending Seems to Have Picked Up Key SALT Vote

By a WALL STREET JOURNAL Staff Reporter

WASHINGTON — President Carter's stepped-up defense spending plan probably picked up one crucial vote for the strategic arms limitation treaty, but a number of Senators questioned the sincerity of the administration's military commitment.

Defense Secretary Harold Brown outlined the new spending plans to the Senate Armed Services Committee. In response, Sen. Sam Nunn, the influential Georgia Democrat who had said he wouldn't support SALT unless the administration boosted defense spending, said: "My reaction is positive. I applaud your initiative."

His comments suggested that he's likely to back the treaty, although he said he would "reserve judgment" until he studies the new plan, which includes many of the initiatives Sen. Nunn has been demanding during the past few months. In line with the request of Sen. Nunn and others, Mr. Carter has decided to boost defense spending during the next five years by an average of more than 4% a year, after taking inflation into

account. The administration previously had said 3% "real" increases were adequate. "I welcome the ability of anybody to change his mind," Sen. Nunn said. "It's an act of statesmanship."

Other committee members were more querulous, however, trying to portray the new spending plan as a Carter flip-flop designed to win support for the controversial treaty when it comes up for a Senate vote next year.

Motives Questioned

Sen. Henry Jackson asked: "Is this a quick fix that's going to disappear the moment we vote on SALT?" The Washington Democrat, a staunch opponent of the U.S.-Soviet treaty, noted that as late as September President Carter opposed the type of increases he's currently requesting over the five years starting in fiscal 1981, which begins Oct. 1.

"This budget wasn't put together to sell SALT," Secretary Brown replied. "It was put together to meet defense needs." He said the new budget is a response to "more than a decade of steady, resolute and comprehensive growth on the part of the Soviet Union that we simply haven't matched."

Mr. Brown said that recent turmoil in the Mideast, the increasing activity of Soviet-backed Cuban troops around the world and the drive by Vietnam to dominate Southeast Asia have convinced the administration that "we must decide . . . whether we intend to remain the strongest nation in the world." Otherwise, he said, "We must accept . . . that we will let ourselves slip into inferiority, into a position of weakness in a harsh world where principles unsupported by power are victimized and that we will become a nation with more of a past than a future."

Plan Outlined

Under the Carter plan, Mr. Brown said spending in fiscal 1981 will rise to about \$142 billion from \$127.4 billion this year, an increase of about 3.4% after inflation. Total obligational authority — money committed for spending next year and in the future — will rise about \$20 billion to \$157.5 billion next year, a real increase of 5.6%. Total defense obligations will increase an average of 4.85% a year after inflation over the next five years, with annual outlays — money actually spent each year — rising an average of more than 4% a year. Mr. Brown said the Pentagon will seek supplementary funds if necessary to keep ahead of inflation.

The money will buy more strategic weapons, 95 new ships, including a fleet of guided-missile destroyers to defend the Navy against Soviet air attack, and a rapid-deployment force that could reach distant trouble spots quickly.

Sen. John Culver (D., Iowa) expressed

concern that the emphasis on building forces capable of fighting conventional conflicts may tempt the U.S. to go to war. "Adequate military strength makes it easier to be restrained in our actions," Mr. Brown replied. "In preventing a superpower conflict" in regions of the world, "deterrence will depend on who gets there first," he said.

Bigger Commitments Sought

Some Senators, such as John Tower (R., Texas), suggested that the planned budget increase isn't big enough. They would like to win commitments of even bigger spending increases.

Secretary Brown said the new budget properly balances domestic and military needs and will be adequate if the Senate ratifies SALT. Otherwise, the U.S. will have to spend more to keep up with the Soviets, he said.

Mr. Brown conceded that the administration currently doesn't have the 67 Senate votes needed to win ratification of the SALT agreement. But he said President Carter plans to push for both SALT and a defense spending increase as he prepares for next year's elections.